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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 OTTAWA 003258

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT BUSH VISIT BRINGS TOGETHER DISPARATE
ARRAY OF DEMONSTRATORS

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Brian Flora, reasons 1.4 (b)
) (d)

1. (C) Summary: Preparations were in place for large protests during the visit of President Bush but in the end it was a small, albeit at times unruly lot that demonstrated. The stalwarts, such as the Raging Grannies and "No War/No to Bush" coalition, were paralleled by anarchists and others, but overall there did not seem to be widespread popular support for the anti-Bush display. There were no more than 5,000 total in Ottawa, with some 4,000 overall in Halifax. Demonstrators were of two persuasions, one group reasonably orderly and passive, and another group that engaged in sporadic incidents of violence throughout the two-day visit which left ten policemen hospitalized. The modest numbers appear to reflect an inability by protest organizers to develop a compelling theme more than anything, but may also show the practical side to Canadians, and a desire to move beyond particular policies and see bilateral relations improve more broadly. End Summary

Raging Grannies and Belly Dancers vs. Bush

2. (U) Police and public security officials were braced for the worst in Ottawa during the President's visit but in the end the demonstrations were modest in size, although at times violent. There appeared to be a good deal of mobilizing in the week preceding the visit, with "No to Bush" and "Rally Against BMD" posters all over the city and protest websites reporting large numbers of hits. There was talk of largescale bussing from other cities. Some organizers were hoping for numbers in the tens of thousands and while expressing the desire for a peaceful protest, did not promise there wouldn't be conflict. Police brought in hundreds of officers from Toronto and other districts and riot police were staged throughout the central downtown district.

3. (U) But lack of information on scheduling and the motorcade, as well as an apparent weak interest, apparently helped disrupt the plans of the disrupters. One key rally was set to start at noon in front of Parliament, just about when the Bush party was leaving the grounds. There were no more than 400 demonstrators on the grounds when the President met with PM Martin in Centre Block. The crowd grew throughout the day and by evening there were several thousand protestors milling about downtown. By then there were apparently two groups -- one largely passive and contained, and another looking for a fight. One protest leader apparently defused a possible conflict when he successfully used a bullhorn to ask protestors to move back from the barricades while other groups threw objects at the police and engaged in shoving matches with public security officers. There were several incidents when the riot police had to push back against the crowd and a handful of arrests, but overall the protests were peaceful and orderly. The rowdiest crowd showed up at the Hotel Chateau Laurier as the delegation left Ottawa December 1, doing mild damage to the outside of the building and putting ten policemen in the hospital (this unfortunately was the kind of incident CNN focused on).

4. (U) In Halifax there was a similar crowd of about 4,000 that staged outside the immigration museum where the President delivered his speech. They had common themes of "No War" and "Bush Go Home," but were, like their Ottawa counterparts, fairly subdued.

Five Finger Waves

5. (U) In both Ottawa and Halifax there were also scattered Bush supporters who did their best to ensure the President saw their positive message. One group was given a tip by the local police and staged outside the airport on the motorcade route. They were given a thumbs up sign by the President, who later thanked them for their "five finger salute" in his speech.

6. (C) What appeared to hurt the demonstrators most was a general lack of any theme. Some commentators have suggested that there will, for any event, be a hard-core of "professional protestors." The Raging Grannies are fairly reliable, one of whom said she was protesting because of President Bush's stand on homosexuality, Iraq, and missile defense (this sort of potpourri of issues led one commentator

to complain that protestors were &inventing protest.") The Belly Dancers Against Bush were nowhere to be seen and did not make a statement after the visit (they do tend to be more active in the summer for obvious reasons). One of the key groups was &No War⁸ and &No to Bush,⁸ a coalition that grew out of the run-up to the Iraq war and focuses on Iraq and missile defense. But there was little intelligent discourse on Iraq either during or after the visit, and other than demanding a pull-out from Iraq, the demonstrators had little to say. There were also anarchists and other violent protestors sprinkled in, including some anti-Semitic skinhead type groups who were responsible for the violence that accompanied the protests. All of this contrasts distinctly with the 20,000 demonstrators who came out to oppose the invasion of Iraq in 2003 when they may have believed their voice, and their numbers, would count.

17. (C) Missile defense was the one theme that got people out with a coherent and manageable message. There was a small demonstration on the Saturday preceding the visit against Canadian participation in the BMD program, which had fewer than a hundred demonstrators on Parliament Hill in a very well-organized display. Anti-BMD demonstrators and themes were also sprinkled in the crowds during the visit.

Jack Layton Multi-Tasks

18. (C) NDP,s Jack Layton was the only party leader to get involved in the protests. Layton used party funds to hire an auto-dialing telemessage service to call 2000 Ottawa-area NDP supporters to encourage them to attend a candlelight vigil on Parliament Hill. He also gave them the times and locations for several protests throughout the day. Ironically, Layton went from the Parliament Hill protest directly to the President,s reception at the Museum of Civilization. (Or perhaps not so ironically, since Layton apparently used his time with US officials to continue his protest against BMD).

19. (C) Comment: The President,s visit was a good time to take stock of popular opposition to U.S. policies. In the end an optimist could be somewhat encouraged. One columnist went so far as to suggest that the protests were so small as to be embarrassing and &President Bush deserved a better show.⁸ While there is still widespread antipathy for certain U.S. policies here and for the current administration in particular, there is also a rising sense that the bilateral relationship is simply too important to allow such antipathy to overcome traditional Canadian practicality and it is time to move forward.

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